What do We Mean by Culture?

Culture – Dimensions and Context

Culture is a widely-used term but a single definition of the word is elusive. As a concept, the meaning of culture may subtly change according to the context in which it is being used. This is partly because it can reflect a range of characteristics.

Specific cultures can be defined by a group of people sharing language, religion, or an ethnic or geographic origin. More broadly, it may embrace common customs, tastes in food, drink, music or the arts, or through participation in a set of rituals and events.

In today's world of easy travel, mass communication and extensive migration, we can argue that culture operates on several levels. For example, in my social life I may be part of a group that is of a similar age and shares similar interests in music. On weekends I may attend church and engage in social and supportive initiatives of that community.

When I go shopping I may seek out shops that appeal to my culinary preferences, or spend time in particular aisles of the supermarket. At home, I may speak the language of my parents but read local newspapers in English. When I travel I choose destinations that help me understand more about where I came from and how it relates to other parts of the world. At election time, I celebrate the democratic principles that allow me to vote and hear views expressed that are often different to my own. Most significantly, this blend of cultural identities translates into a set of attitudes, values and behaviours that condition my actions as a consumer.

Although my personal cultural dimensions are relatively unique, many aspects are shared with others whose actions as consumers are similar. Often, these people have a similar background to me and we exchange opinions, recommendations and information about our experience as consumers. This in turn translates into purchase preferences that make our group quite different from other consumer groups or 'cultural segments'.

Often, the attitudes, values and behaviours of migrants persist for multiple generations. This 'cultural cling' is encouraged by supportive policies in some migrant-destination countries, such as Australia, that recognise the value of diversity and promote genuinely **multicultural** societies.

Such policies promote *integration* with the host society, rather than *assimilation.* This enables people to maintain their differences while actively participating in, and contributing to, their new society; the approach challenges views that migrants should 'blend in' and 'be like us'.

The Origins Classification – Reflecting the Dimensions of Culture

The Origins product works from the principle that a person's name is generally a good reflection of the cultural background of that individual.

One of the advantages of the Origins name analysis approach is that it recognises the ancestral origin of both the first name and the family name. By assessing the origin of the first name we can infer the extent of 'cultural cling'. For example, people with Italian family name that have an Anglo-Celtic first name are more likely to be seeking greater integration with mainstream

Australian society than people who give their children more traditional Italian names such as Mauro or Rosa.

Individual differences due to various dimensions of cultural background have an influence on the attitudes we have, the services we seek, the products we buy, our brand allegiance, and the expectations we have for a positive customer experience. Experience and research shows that cultural groups with similar sets of differences deliver contrasting and measurable value to different organisations.

The Origins classification, largely for reasons of practicality, generally assigns each combination of personal and family name to a single code, which based on our observations and research, reflects the **most defining** cultural dimension of that name origin. The following examples illustrate some of the labels used at the most detailed level of the Origins classification.

Countries, Regions	Religion	Ethnicity
• Hungary • Slovakia • England : Cornwall • Italy : Trentino Alto Adige • South America	• Jewish • Islamic • India : Sikh	• South Africa : Shona • Spain : Basque
Colonial History	Language	First Peoples
• Afrikaner • French Caribbean • British South Africa	• Chinese Mandarin • Belgium Walloon • French Canadian	• Native American • Indigenous Australia • Maori

As some of the examples show, sometimes more than one cultural dimension may be reflected in the descriptive label.

We use the acronym CEL (Cultural, Ethnic, Linguistic) as a descriptor of the most detailed level in the Origins typology. Currently, there are 257 CEL codes in the Origins classification. For practical purposes, these are normally aggregated in various ways to suit the particular business purpose.

The Origins Proposition

As supported by case studies and through experience of working with clients in banking, insurance, automotive, health, sport, energy, retail, local government, entertainment and others, analysis by name origin reveals a strong correlation between the Origins code and consumer behaviour. As a piece of data, it performs well as a differentiating variable in all forms of profiling, modelling, segmentation and mapping.

From this we conclude that name analysis, and the Origins classification, acts as a convenient and effective surrogate for measuring the cultural dimension of the different attitudes, values and behaviours of consumers.

For customer insight teams, operational managers and marketers, Origins offers a way to measure diversity and enhance customer experience, particularly in website and call centre

touchpoints. For human resource managers, Origins offers a way to measure workplace cultural diversity and to assess the alignment of cultural diversity among employees, customers and the markets from which they are drawn.

For publicly-listed businesses and government departments, Origins offers a cost-effective opportunity to measure and monitor its overall engagement with multicultural Australia and provide benchmarks for use in public reporting of corporate social responsibility, or reporting its achievements in relation to access and equity.